

SINTI AND ROMA IN GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS – OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES ON A NEGLECTED FIELD

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The following abstract aims to discuss the historical situation of Sinti and Roma in the German concentration camp system¹. This is a draft for discussion, written as a basis for a lecture and not as a fully elaborated essay on the topic.

Research on Sinti and Roma in Concentration camps – where are we right now?

Single books and articles on the persecution and extermination of the European Roma have been published since the 1950s², covering topics like the deportations to occupied Poland in May 1940 or the question of racial persecution in general. For historians during that time, the role of Sinti and Roma inside the concentration camp system was not more than a footnote. The first serious attempt to address this topic was a thin booklet by Selma Steinmetz with the title “Österreichs Zigeuner im NS-Staat”³. The booklet included a short chapter (15 pages) on the main concentration camps Dachau, Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, and Auschwitz, in which Steinmetz gave a lot of room to the memories of survivors from these camps. But the information given on the life in the camps is sketchy at best. The first general approach on the history of “gypsies” in the Third Reich was then made by two British authors in 1972. Under the title “The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies”, linguist Donald Kenrick and Roma-Activist Grattan Puxon assembled a history of persecution and extermination that also included a chapter on “Concentration camps and medical experiments”. Based on historical documents and accounts from surviving Sinti and Roma as well as other prisoners, they presented an account of the situation in all the main camps. While they were able to collect lots of information on the “Familienlager” in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the description on the other camps remained fragmentary. The book was translated into German and published during the first height of the Sinti and Roma civil rights movement in 1981⁴.

The civil rights movement and the rise of “everyday history” (Alltagsgeschichte) in Germany led to more and more local approaches on the history of Sinti and Roma during National Socialism, but these publications barely touched the topic of the concentration camps⁵ and rather concentrated on the everyday life and persecution in different German towns and regions. In 1991 Romani Rose and Walter Weiss of the still young “Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma” presented 170 pages that focused on

¹ This means, I will not cover the communal camps (“Kommunale Zwangslager”) that were opened in Germany and Austria from 1935/36 on and sometimes resembled concentration camps. Newer publications on this topic are: Patricia Pientka, *Das Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma in Berlin-Marzahn. Alltag, Verfolgung und Deportation* (Reihe Zeitgeschichte N 11), Berlin 2013; Susanne Urban/Sascha Feuchert/Markus Roth (Eds.), *Fundstücke. Stimmen der Überlebenden des "Zigeunerlagers"* Lackenbach (Fundstücke 1), Göttingen 2014. For a general overview see: Carola Fings, *Nationalsozialistische Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma*, in: Wolfgang Benz/Barbara Distel (Eds.), *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, Vol. 9, München 2009, pp. 193–217 This essay also mainly focuses on the camps in the “Altreich” (Germany and Austria), leaving out the different forms of imprisonment in eastern and south-eastern Europe.

² For a comprehensive overview see the chapter on historiography in Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"*, Hamburg 1996, p. 23 ff.. The most recent bibliography can be found in Alexandra Bartels/Tobias von Borke/Markus End/Anna Friedrich (Eds.), *Antiziganistische Zustände. Kritische Positionen gegen gewaltvolle Verhältnisse*, Münster 2013, p. 314 ff..

³ Selma Steinmetz, *Österreichs Zigeuner im NS-Staat* (Monographien zur Zeitgeschichte), Wien [u.a.] 1966.

⁴ Donald Kenrick/Grattan Puxon, *Sinti und Roma - die Vernichtung eines Volkes im NS-Staat*, Göttingen 1981. The German version unfortunately suffers from a bad translation and a flawed bibliography. See also Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"*, p. 388-389 (Footnote 61) ff.

⁵ One exception being Wolfgang Günther, *"Ach Schwester, ich kann nicht mehr tanzen ..."*. Sinti und Roma im KZ Bergen-Belsen, Hannover 1990.

Sinti and Roma as slave-laborer in the concentration camp system. The sources of their text are rather simple: they collected information mainly from the literature on forced labor and concentration camps in general, the records of the Nurnberg-Trials and other well-known documents⁶. But one aspect makes this approach on the history of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps rather interesting: in 1987 Rose and Weiss conducted 26 interviews with survivors of the camps, which can be seen as the first organized attempt to record the stories of Sinti and Roma who had survived National Socialism⁷. During that period, the history of the "Zigeunerfamilienlager" was finally put on a factual basis, when in 1993 the camp register was edited. The two volumes now serve as a monument for the approximately 22.600 Sinti and Roma who were deported to that part of the Auschwitz Concentration camp⁸. Together with short introductory essays, accounts from survivors and statistics on mortality rates or professions, the two volumes with their sheer endless lists of names still serve as a solid basis for future research on the history of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camp system, especially for the time after 1943. Since then the research on the history of Sinti and Roma in Auschwitz has been the most detailed of all the camps⁹. Because of the good documentation and the sheer number of people that were deported and murdered, also the emerging micro-history in Germany was able to add facts and names on the "Familienlager" and its inmates¹⁰. From the mid-90s on, the first great monographs on the persecution of Sinti and Roma began to emerge. For their works, Michael Zimmermann¹¹, Guenter

⁶ Romani Rose/Walter Weiss, Sinti und Roma im 'Dritten Reich'. Das Programm der Vernichtung durch Arbeit, Heidelberg 1998. It is also important to understand, that the book was not only written for the sake of historical research, but also as ammunition in the fight for reparations and pensions.

⁷ Since then, numerous accounts of Sinti and Roma that survived National Socialism have been published or archived, but in my impression there is a clear predominance of those, who survived the "Familienlager" in Auschwitz. A systematical use of these scattered sources as a basis for the history of the camps has not happened yet.

⁸ Staatliches Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Ed.), Gedenkbuch. Die Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau. Bd. 1, München 1993; id., Gedenkbuch. Die Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau. Bd. 2, München 1993.

⁹ Wacław Długoborski (Ed.), Sinti und Roma im KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1943-44. Vor dem Hintergrund ihrer Verfolgung unter der Nazi Herrschaft, Oświęcim 1998; Sławomir Kapralski/Maria Martyniak/Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, Roma in Auschwitz (Voices of Memory 7), Oświęcim 2011; Otto Rosenberg, Das "Zigeunerlager" in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in: Helgard Kramer (Ed.), Die Gegenwart der NS-Vergangenheit, Berlin 2000, pp. 221-238; Udo Wohlfeld, Das "Zigeunerlager" im KZ Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mord an den Sinti und Roma 1943 - 1944, Weimar 2012.

¹⁰ Many of these publications even have Auschwitz in their title, as for example Reinhold Baaske, Aus Niedersachsen nach Auschwitz. Die Verfolgung der Sinti und Roma in der NS-Zeit ; Katalog zur Ausstellung des Niedersächsischen Verbandes Deutscher Sinti e.V., Bielefeld 2004; Udo Engbring-Romang, Wiesbaden-Auschwitz. Zur Verfolgung der Sinti in Wiesbaden (Hornhaut auf der Seele 2), Darmstadt 1997¹; Udo Engbring-Romang, Marburg, Auschwitz. Zur Verfolgung der Sinti in Marburg und Umgebung (Marburger Stadtschriften zur Geschichte und Kultur Bd. 62), Marburg 1998; Hans Hesse/Jens Schreiber, Vom Schlachthof nach Auschwitz. Die NS-Verfolgung der Sinti und Roma aus Bremen, Bremerhaven und Nordwestdeutschland (Wissenschaftliche Beiträge aus dem Tectum Verlag. Reihe Geschichtswissenschaft Bd. 1), Marburg 1999.

¹¹ Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage".

Lewy¹², and Martin Luchterhandt¹³ consulted a whole new set of sources and considered archives all over Europe. Up until today their books are the benchmark for future research¹⁴. But what do they say about Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps? Zimmermann gives plenty of room to the “Zigeunerfamilienlager” and the developments leading first to the establishment of the camp and later to the extermination of the majority of its inmates. In comparison, the other camps get a rather short treatment; only 7 pages are dedicated to a chapter called “In the Concentration Camps”. Still, it leaves us with a dense amount of information about transports and general numbers of prisoners, even if the numbers are over 20 years old by now and probably would not withstand a closer examination. Lewy on the other hand handles the topic on a broader scale, and information on Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps can be found in different parts of the book (as he splits the history chronologically into three major chapters). His advantage is the use of more than 1000 “Zigeunerpersonalakten” from three different archives in northern Germany, from which Lewy is able to reconstruct the individual persecution of Sinti and Roma. Thus the book gives us some interesting information on the general persecution from the late 1930s on¹⁵. The shorter parts on the particular camps on the other hand mainly just bundle the known facts without any new insights, neither is there an attempt of a general analysis of the situation of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps¹⁶. Since then, articles, books, or chapters in catalogs on nearly all main camps of the concentration camp system have been published¹⁷. Today there are publications on Sachsenhausen¹⁸, Ravensbrück¹⁹,

¹² Guenter Lewy, “Rückkehr nicht erwünscht”. Die Verfolgung der Zigeuner im Dritten Reich, München 2001. Lewy’s book has been criticized quite heavily, as he uses the term „Zigeuner“ throughout the whole text without any critical reflection and even states that the use of terms like Sinti or Roma is just misunderstood “political correctness. *ibid.*, p. 10. For a critique of Lewy’s antiziganist stereotypes and a review of this assumptions on the extermination of Sinti and Roma see the statement of the “Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma Heidelberg” Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum deutscher Sinti und Roma, Wider die Relativierung des Völkermords an den Sinti und Roma. Stellungnahme des Dokumentationszentrum zu neueren Veröffentlichungen zum Thema, 2003, [http://www.sintiundroma.de/uploads/media/stellungnahme_relativierung.pdf], accessed 29.8.2014. For a deeper analysis of the term “Zigeuner” and its discriminating meaning see Alexandra Bartels, Antiziganismus benennen. Zur sprachlichen Diskriminierung durch das 'Zigeuner'-Wort, in: Alexandra Bartels/Tobias von Borke/Markus End/Anna Friedrich (Eds.), Antiziganistische Zustände. Kritische Positionen gegen gewaltvolle Verhältnisse, Münster 2013, pp. 20–38.

¹³ Martin Luchterhandt, Der Weg nach Birkenau. Entstehung und Verlauf der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung der “Zigeuner” (Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Polizeigeschichte 4), Lübeck 2000.

¹⁴ See also the catalogue for the renewed exhibition in the “Dokumentationszentrum” in Heidelberg. This book is still the best collection of documents, photographs, biographies, and quotes on the topic. Romani Rose (Ed.), “Den Rauch hatten wir täglich vor Augen”. Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma, Heidelberg 1999.

¹⁵ His interpretation of these documents of the perpetrators is on the other hand often arguable.

¹⁶ On the fact that most of his sources were already known to historians see Karola Fings/Frank Sparing, Rassismus - Lager - Völkermord. Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln (Schriften des NS-Dokumentationszentrums der Stadt Köln Bd. 13), Köln 2005, p. 13 f.

¹⁷ These publications are almost exclusively written in German.

¹⁸ Astrid Ley/Günter Morsch, Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen, in: Astrid Ley/Günter Morsch (Eds.), Medizin und Verbrechen. Das Krankenrevier des KZ-Sachsenhausen 1936-1945 (Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten 22), Berlin 2007, pp. 223–273.

¹⁹ Barbara Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 81–98.

Neuengamme²⁰, Bergen-Belsen²¹, Mittelbau-Dora²², Natzweiler-Struthof²³, Wewelsburg²⁴, Flossenbürg²⁵ as well as on the Jugendschutzlager Moringen²⁶ and the Ghetto in Łódź²⁷, even if the quality of these attempts varies. Unfortunately three of the biggest camps – Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau – are still not covered in singular publications.

Furthermore, since the early 1990s different authors have made the attempt to write comprehensive articles on Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps²⁸, but none were able to add new perspectives on the topic or even managed to draft ideas for future research.

Sinti and Roma in German concentration camps: a chronology

After an analysis of the history of Dachau and a comparison with other concentration camps, I would advocate five distinctive (and yet overlapping) periods:

1933-1938: Individual arrests and actions against “gypsies and beggars”

1938-1940: The first massive actions against Sinti and Roma

1940-1943: The persecution tightens

1943-1945: The “Zigeunerfamilienlager” and its consequences

1944-1945: After Auschwitz: Sinti and Roma as workforce

These five periods demonstrate how closely the history of Sinti and Roma in the camps was connected to the general persecution of Sinti and Roma during National Socialism. The history of these camps

²⁰ Kathrin Herold/Yvonne Robel, Roma und Sinti im Konzentrationslager Neuengamme. Eine Spurensuche, in: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg (Ed.), Die nationalsozialistische Verfolgung Hamburger Roma und Sinti. Fünf Beiträge, Hamburg 2006, pp. 103–114.

²¹ Thomas Rahe, Sinti und Roma in Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen. Eine Zwischenbilanz der historischen Forschung, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 108–126.

²² Jens-Christian Wagner, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Mittelbau-Dora, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 99–107; Jens-Christian Wagner (Ed.), Von Auschwitz in den Harz. Sinti und Roma im KZ Mittelbau-Dora. Begleitheft zur Wanderausstellung, Nordhausen-Weimar 2012.

²³ Anita Awosusi/Andreas Pflock, Sinti und Roma im KZ Natzweiler-Struthof, Anregungen für einen Gedenkstättenbesuch. Geschichte, Rundgang, Biografien, Informationen (Perspektiven - Materialien für Schule und Bildung 1), Mannheim 2006.

²⁴ Kirsten John, Sinti und Roma im KZ Niederhagen/Wewelsburg (Büren-Wewelsburg), in: Karola Fings/Ulrich Friedrich Opfermann (Eds.), Zigeunerverfolgung im Rheinland und in Westfalen 1933-1945. Geschichte, Aufarbeitung und Erinnerung, Paderborn 2012, pp. 101–107.

²⁵ Norbert Aas, Sinti und Roma im KZ Flossenbürg und in seinen Außenlagern Wolkenburg und Zwodau, Bayreuth 2001.

²⁶ Dietmar Sedlaczek, Nur eine Zwischenstation. Sinti und Roma im Jugend-KZ Moringen, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 69–80.

²⁷ Frank Sparing, Das "Zigeunerwohngebiet" im Ghetto Lodz 1941/42, in: Christoph Dieckmann/Babette Quinkert (Eds.), Im Ghetto 1939 - 1945. Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus 25), Göttingen 2009, pp. 136–170; Julian Baranowski, Zigeunerlager in Litzmannstadt. 1941-1942. The gypsy camp in Łódź / Obóz cygański w Łodzi, Łódź 2003.

²⁸ For example Guenter Lewy, Gypsies in German Concentration Camps, in: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Ed.), Roma and Sinti. Under-Studied Victims of Nazism. Symposium Proceedings 2002, pp. 23–31; Gudrun Schwarz, Sinti und Roma in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern ein allgemeiner Überblick, in: Waclaw Długoborski (Ed.), Sinti und Roma im KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1943-44. Vor dem Hintergrund ihrer Verfolgung unter der Nazi Herrschaft, Oświęcim 1998, pp. 229–258.

mirrors the different orders, laws and the increasing pressure against the group. This chronology also shows the influence of other factors, like the course of the Second World War.

1933-1938

Until 1937 mostly individuals were brought to the camps of Dachau²⁹, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen for political reasons or violations of working-duties. Larger groups came to Dachau for example in connection with a more general course of action against “gypsies and beggars”, but were rarely registered as “gypsies”. It is therefore hard to estimate the number of Sinti and Roma who were part of these early transports. This becomes clear, when for example looking at a transport of 100-120 people that arrived in Dachau in July 1936 and was announced by the political police in Munich as a measurement of „Bettler- und Zigeunerbekämpfung“³⁰. But as exact numbers on “gypsies” are not given, this still needs to be researched on an individual basis. In Buchenwald as well the Sinti and Roma who came into the camp in 1937 were mostly registered as “Schutzhäftlinge” and did not form a distinctive group³¹. For this period sources are rare, and most of the main camps did not yet exist.

1938-1940

From 1938 on, especially during the “Aktion Arbeitsscheu Reich” (“work-shy Reich”), larger groups of Sinti and Roma were arrested and then brought into concentration camps like Dachau as a clearly identifiable group of “gypsies”³². Most authors on Sinti and Roma define this as a major break in the persecution and at the same time have to admit that they are not able to provide exact numbers³³. From June 13th to 18th 1938 every “Kriminalpolizeileitstelle” was told to arrest at least 200 men (about 3000 in total), but these numbers were excelled by the local authorities. An estimated number of 9000 to 10000 men was deported, mainly to Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and partly to Dachau³⁴. Many of the communal camps served as a reservoir for the police, which arrested hundreds of Sinti and Roma out of these camps and deported them³⁵. From this time on, Sinti and Roma were an integral part of the prisoner’s society in the concentration camps³⁶.

²⁹ For example Bernhard Pabst, who was arrested in 1934. DaA, A 1554 (Peter Heinemann: Ein Holz mit einem Namen. Wie ein KZ-Gefangener der Nachwelt eine Botschaft zukommen ließ).

³⁰ Bayrische Politische Polizei an den Kommandanten des Konzentrationslagers Dachau vom 01.07.1936. DaA Zigeuner, Angaben verschiedene, A 1161. In nearly all of the available literature on the persecution of Sinti and Roma, a transport of 400 Bavarian Sinti and Roma to Dachau in the summer of 1936 is mentioned, but there are no sources given to proof this fact. The authors always only refer to the literature on the topic, but never to archival sources.

³¹ Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 1937-1945. Begleitband zur ständigen historischen Ausstellung, ed. by Buchenwald Gedenkstätte, Göttingen 1999, p. 74.

³² For the interpretation of 1938 as an general break in the persecution of Sinti and Roma see Hans Dieter Schmid, Verfolgung der Sinti und Roma in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 11–23, here p. 15 f.

³³ Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 1937-1945, p. 74.

³⁴ Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Masseneinweisungen in Konzentrationslager. Aktion "Arbeitsscheu Reich", Novemberpogrom, Aktion "Gewitter", in: *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* 1 (2005), pp. 156–164, here p. 158.

³⁵ Patricia Pientka, Leben und Verfolgung im Zwangslager Berlin-Marzahn 1936-1945, in: KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed.), Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14), Bremen 2012, pp. 55–68, here p. 61; Frank Sparing, NS-Verfolgung von "Zigeunern" und "Wiedergutmachung" nach 1945, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 22-23 (2011), pp. 8–15, here p. 10; Karola Fings/Frank Sparing, Z. Zt. Zigeunerlager. Die Verfolgung der Düsseldorfer Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus, Köln 1992, p. 61.

³⁶ They mostly stayed in the camps, since from June 1940 on, Jews and “gypsies” were not released anymore. Sparing, NS-Verfolgung von "Zigeunern" und "Wiedergutmachung" nach 1945, p. 10.

The next step in this course of action against Sinti and Roma in Germany and Austria was the deportation of hundreds of men and women from the Burgenland in June 1939. More than 3000 people were planned to be deported under the subject „Vorbeugende Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage im Burgenland“. In a letter from June 5th 1939, the „Reichskriminalpolizeiamt“ ordered, “[...] die arbeitsscheuen und in besonderem Maße asozialen Zigeuner oder Zigeunermischlinge des Burgenlandes in polizeiliche Vorbeugungshaft zu nehmen.”³⁷ The men were to be brought to Dachau, the women to Ravensbrück. In reality the number of people that got arrested was much smaller, and on June 28th 1939 554 Sinti and Roma from Austria were listed in the registry book for Dachau³⁸. The next day 440 female Sinti and Roma arrived in Ravensbrück. This transport is often found in the memories of other prisoners, as the newly arrived prisoners had to sit on the ground in front of the shower room for two days, until the registration was completed. During that time they were at the mercy of the guards and exposed to the elements³⁹. The Austrian politician Walter Adam, who was a prisoner in Dachau from 1938 until 1943, remembered the transport of the men coming to Dachau: “Die Zigeuner wurden wie eine Herde zusammengefangen, Männer und Knaben kamen nach Dachau ... Sie wurden ähnlich behandelt wie die Juden, und auch unter ihnen war die Sterblichkeit hoch.”⁴⁰ At the end of September 1939 the Sinti and Roma from Dachau were brought to Buchenwald and Mauthausen and the majority did not return⁴¹. In Buchenwald the brutal treatment continued⁴². Especially during the winter of 1939/40 many of the deported froze to death or lost fingers or toes due to the cold. Other prisoners called the Sinti and Roma who had been coming from Dachau “Zündis”, because they were thin as matches. Nine months later, only half of them were still alive⁴³. Of the 250 Sinti and Roma who had been deported to Mauthausen from August 1938 on, approximately 140 died, especially in the infamous quarry.

1940-1943

On the one hand, from 1940 on, once again mostly individuals were deported to Dachau and other camps for being “gypsies”. These people and the reasons for their arrest clearly demonstrated the regime’s advancing discrimination and prosecution of Sinti and Roma. In the camps, one could find Sinti and Roma who violated the “Festsetzungserlass”⁴⁴, those who tried to get back to Germany after the deportations to the “Generalgouvernement” in Mai 1940⁴⁵, people that were simply arrested during raids⁴⁶, or those who tried to leave Germany⁴⁷. The arrests also reflect the antiziganism of the institutions involved, as people were arrested on the accusation of espionage⁴⁸ or on behalf of an edict

³⁷ Document printed in Steinmetz, Österreichs Zigeuner im NS-Staat, p. 51.

³⁸ Registry book for the Dachau concentration camp.

³⁹ Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Steinmetz, Österreichs Zigeuner im NS-Staat, p. 61.

⁴¹ Only some people wie Peter Gussak (from the Steiermark), who returned to Dachau from Mauthausen in May 1939, was transferred to Buchenwald on the 26th of September 1939 and after a stop in Neuengamme returned to Dachau a third time in 1941. DaA Häftlingsdatenbank.

⁴² DaA, A 1166 (Zigeuner. Blach Rudolf Bericht: Kummet Gerd).

⁴³ Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage", p. 121 f..

⁴⁴ Fings/Sparing, Rassismus - Lager - Völkermord. Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln, p. 269 f.; Von dem Knesebeck, Julia, The Roma Struggle For Compensation in Post-War Germany, Herdfordshire 2011, p. 116.

⁴⁵ <http://www.sintiundroma.de/sinti-roma/ns-voelkermord/vernichtung/widerstand/denunziation.html> [22.11.2012].

⁴⁶ Habicht, Vera: Karl Wacker Horvath. Ceija Stojka erinnert an ihren Vater, In: Sabine Gerhardus/Monika Böck, Gedächtnisbuch für die Häftlinge des KZ Dachau - Namen statt Nummern (Ausstellungskatalog), Berlin 2008, p. 104 ff.

⁴⁷ Jakob Bamberger, Und mir wollten sie den Hungerstreik verbieten..., in: *Pogrom. Zeitschrift für bedrohte Völker (Sonderausgabe III. Welt-Roma-Kongreß 1981)* 12 (1981), 80/81, pp. 144–146.

⁴⁸ Fings/Sparing, Rassismus - Lager - Völkermord. Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln, p. 269 f.. A man called Waldemar Braun was arrested in 1942, when he was trying to get to France with his Family. He was

on fortune telling (an aspect that affected women only)⁴⁹. Men as well as women could be accused of "Rassenschande" ("racial shame")⁵⁰.

On the other hand, the mobility of Sinti and Roma inside the concentration camp system grew, as the system expanded. Prisoners were deported from one camp to another, mostly because workers were needed somewhere else⁵¹. Sometimes the prisoners would even return to the camp they had been imprisoned in before⁵², like the Austrian Rudolf Blach⁵³ (he came to Dachau twice, the second time as part of a so called "invalid transport"), or the German Sinto Jakob Bamberger (who ended up in Buchenwald a second time after being abused for medical experiments in Dachau)⁵⁴.

1943-1945

The "Auschwitz-Erlass" and the opening of the "Zigeunerfamilienlager" in Auschwitz had a substantial influence on the other concentration camps. In Ravensbrück for example the rather dense rhythm of deportations into the camp in spring 1943 came to an end for the time being⁵⁵. This was the peak of a development that had been going on since 1940, in which no longer German concentration camps like Dachau were the aim of mass deportations of Sinti and Roma, but rather the occupied territories in Poland (as the ghetto in Łódź) or now the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Deportations to Auschwitz of Sinti and Roma who had already been imprisoned in the concentration camps seem to have been exceptions⁵⁶. The other way around was, however, not uncommon, as the "Zigeunerfamilienlager" in Auschwitz partly served as a reservoir of workers, who were deported to other camps when needed⁵⁷.

1944-1945

During the last one and a half years of the war, the number of Sinti and Roma in Dachau and other camps rose again and Sinti and Roma became part of the prisoner's society in all the main camps. Deportations from Auschwitz to other camps of men and women, who were still able to work, can be

tortured by the Gestapo and also spent some time in Dachau: Adam Strauß/Josef Behringer (Eds.), *Flucht - Internierung - Deportation - Vernichtung. Hessische Sinti und Roma berichten über ihre Verfolgung während des Nationalsozialismus*, Seeheim 2005, p. 115 f.. Another example is Hubert W., who came to Dachau in 1940, because he was arrested near a position of anti-aircraft guns. Fings/Sparing, *Rassismus - Lager - Völkermord. Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln*, p. 269 ff..

⁴⁹ Danckwortt, *Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück*, p. 82.

⁵⁰ For Dachau see Strauß/Behringer (Eds.), *Flucht - Internierung - Deportation - Vernichtung. Hessische Sinti und Roma berichten über ihre Verfolgung während des Nationalsozialismus*, p. 115 f.. For Ravensbrück see Danckwortt, *Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück*, p. 82.

⁵¹ Like Josef Bern and his father (to Dachau from Mauthausen on 13th of February 1943) who worked for Messerschmitt in Augsburg. Bern, Margot: „Mein Mann hat nicht viel erzählt“, In: Daniel Strauß/Ilona Lagrene (Eds.), *...weggekommen. Berichte und Zeugnisse von Sinti, die die NS-Verfolgung überlebt haben*, Berlin 2000, p. 26 ff.. See also the four examples given for the Wewelsburg concentration camp: John, *Sinti und Roma im KZ Niederhagen/Wewelsburg (Büren-Wewelsburg)*, p. 104 ff.

⁵² For example Anton Mettbach, who was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and Dachau. DaA, A1171/1 (DA Zigeuner, Mettbach Anton, Entschädigungsverfahren).

⁵³ DaA, A 1166 (Zigeuner. Blach Rudolf Bericht: Kummet Gerd).

⁵⁴ In August 1944, 40 Sinti and Roma from Buchenwald were transferred to Dachau. There they were forced to participate in medical experiments on seawater. Bamberger, *Und mir wollten sie den Hungerstreik verbieten...*, p. 145.

⁵⁵ Danckwortt, *Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück*, p. 81–82; 85 ff.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; My list of the prisoners of Dachau identified as Sinti and Roma shows no such case. Also in the literature on the other camps, such cases are rare. One example is the story of Agnes Horvath, who tells, that she came to Auschwitz from Ravensbrück. Michael Teichmann, *Vom Zorn der Überlebenden: Agnes und Peter Horvath erzählen*, in: *dROMa* 2005, No. 6, pp. 3–11. In the "Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939 -1945" no exact origins are given for the transports to the „Familienlager“.

⁵⁷ Like in Natzweiler-Struthof, where 189 Sinti and Roma arrived in November and December 1943. Awosusi/Pflock, *Sinti und Roma im KZ Natzweiler-Struthof, Anregungen für einen Gedenkstättenbesuch. Geschichte, Rundgang, Biografien, Informationen*, p. 21.

found more often from April 1944 on⁵⁸. Especially after the failed attempt to murder the inmates of the "Familienlager" in Mai 1944, groups were transferred to other camps regularly. Alone 1320 Sinti and Roma (213 of them were men) came from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück⁵⁹ and the relatively new concentration camp Mittelbau-Dora served as a main destination for male Sinti and Roma from Auschwitz. About 1500 were brought through Buchenwald to Mittelbau-Dora and ended up in the subcamps in Harzungen, Ellrich-Juliushütte and Dora⁶⁰.

The second big group for whom this last phase became important were the Hungarian Roma. When the SS began to deport and exterminate the Hungarian Jews in 1944, they also rounded up thousands of Roma. In the literature on the German camps this group is rarely present⁶¹, as there seem to be only few sources in German archives. Most of them came from western and southwestern Hungary and were arrested by the "Sicherheitspolizei" during November and December 1944 and brought to the fortress Csillag that was used as a detention camp. The Hungarian Roma ended up in the camps of Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Flossenbürg, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen. 1126 of them came to Dachau, mostly between November 14th and 20th 1944. The lists contain the names of Hungarian Roma families (Bodgán, Balogh, Kalányos, Kolompár, Lakatos, Rigó, Sztojka) and the prisoners were marked with a „Zig“ or „Ung-Zig“⁶². 303 of the Hungarian Roma (mostly women, only twelve men) were then transferred to Ravensbrück at the beginning of December 1944⁶³. In Ravensbrück a transport of 290 women who came directly from Hungary had already arrived on November 28th⁶⁴. Another 245 male Roma were brought from Dachau to Natzweiler-Struthof⁶⁵, where they had to work in different subcamps⁶⁶. At least 125 women were transferred from Dachau to Bergen-Belsen on November 23rd 1944⁶⁷.

Finally this last phase is also characterized by the fact that the Sinti and Roma who had already been in the concentration camp system were evacuated from the camps that were to be liberated and ended up in the camps still under German control. So this last phase is once again a phase of great (forced) mobility. Hundreds of Sinti and Roma were transferred to Munich Riem (one of the subcamps of Dachau) during the last weeks of the war⁶⁸. In Bergen-Belsen Sinti and Roma arrived only from November 1944 on and then again during the last weeks and days before the liberation⁶⁹.

⁵⁸ Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage", p. 340.

⁵⁹ Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 81–82; 85 ff.

⁶⁰ Wagner, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Mittelbau-Dora, p. 99 f.

⁶¹ Zimmermann for example only mentions them in half a sentence. Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage", p. 364. Some information and accounts of survivors can be found in János Bársony/Ágnes Daróczi/Gábor Komáromy (Eds.), *Pharrajimos. The fate of the Roma during the Holocaust*, New York, NY 2008.

⁶² Fischer von Weikerstal, Felicitas, Verfolgung und Vernichtung in der Kunst ungarischer Roma, in: Fischer von Weikerstal, Felicitas/Christoph Garstka/Urs Heftrich/Heinz-Dietrich Löwe (Eds.), *Der nationalsozialistische Genozid an den Roma Osteuropas. Geschichte und künstlerische Verarbeitung*, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2008, pp. 295–331, here p. 302.

⁶³ Research in the database of the Dachau Memorial Site, August 2014.

⁶⁴ Danckwortt, *Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück*, p. 85 f.

⁶⁵ Research in the database of the Dachau Memorial Site, August 2014.

⁶⁶ Awosusi/Pflock, Sinti und Roma im KZ Natzweiler-Struthof, Anregungen für einen Gedenkstättenbesuch. *Geschichte, Rundgang, Biografien, Informationen*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Rahe, Sinti und Roma in Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen, p. 11 ff; Günther, "Ach Schwester, ich kann nicht mehr tanzen ...". Sinti und Roma im KZ Bergen-Belsen, p. 155 f.

⁶⁸ On April 26th 1945 1543 prisoners were listed in Riem. About 200 of them were Sinti and Roma. Ludwig Eiber, "Ich wußte es wird schlimm." Die Verfolgung der Sinti und Roma in München 1933 - 1945, München 1993, p. 84;89 ff.; One of them was Sylvester Lampert. Aussage Sylvester Lampert, ohne Datum. Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, DaA 30.359; Another prisoner was Kurt Adler: Von dem Knesebeck, Julia, *The Roma Struggle For Compensation in Post-War Germany*, p. 181-182;184 ff.

⁶⁹ Rahe, Sinti und Roma in Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen, p. 111 ff.

When the last concentration camps were liberated in the first days of May 1945, the surviving Sinti and Roma were also finally liberated. It is not yet known, how many of them were imprisoned at that point and also the death rate still needs to be investigated.

Identification and numbers

Coming up with reliable numbers of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps has been a problem for years. There are either not enough sources left to confirm the identity of Sinti and Roma in the camps, or the camp administration did not even mark them with a "Z" or "Zig" in the registration books. Sometimes there are sources, but they have not yet been analyzed (especially individual ones, like "Schreibstubenkarten", "Häftlingspersonalkarten", "Arbeitskommandokarten" etc.). Still, today there are estimations for most of the camps. But in order to get a result for all camps, it is impossible to just sum up these numbers, as many prisoners spent time in more than one camp and thus would be counted twice or even more. Therefore, it is necessary to count just those, who came into a camp for the first time ("Neuzugänge", not "Überstellungen"). After a summary of the available numbers I came to the conclusion that at least 7700 Sinti and Roma were imprisoned in the concentration camps in the "Altreich"⁷⁰. Approximately 3300 of these were women and about 4100 had been imprisoned in the "Familienlager" in Auschwitz before. Of course, this number of 7700 has to be seen as an absolute minimum.

Still, even if it is difficult to identify all the Sinti and Roma who were in camps, they were a recognizable group inside the prisoner's society. At least from summer 1938 on, the SS in the camps and also other prisoners were aware of "gypsies" as a group. It probably was not because of the triangles, as special brown triangles were an exception (not a rule as it is stated in some of the literature⁷¹), but still possible. In Dachau, for example, they were probably used during the summer of 1939 for the new registered "Burgenland-Roma"⁷², but after that it was mostly the black triangle of the so called "Asocials" – not only in Dachau, but also in other camps⁷³.

But there is evidence from several camps that "gypsies" were housed in special barracks (at least until the early 1940s), that the SS was urged to treat them differently⁷⁴, that they were deliberately put in the hardest work details, that they stayed together when they were transferred to other camps and that the camp administration was keeping track of "gypsies" inside the camps. Also other prisoners remembered "gypsies" as a group from 1938 on.

Living conditions, working and everyday life in the camps: 10 observations

Comparing the available literature and the accounts of the survivors, brings up a number of similarities.

⁷⁰ I used the available literature and my own research on Mittelbau-Dora, Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, Wewelsburg, Natzweiler-Struthof and Dachau. I was unable to obtain information on how many Sinti and Roma were registered as "Neuzugänge" in Mauthausen, Neuengamme, and Buchenwald.

⁷¹ Often without providing any satisfying proof. See for example Annette Eberle, *Häftlingskategorien und Kennzeichnungen*, in: *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* 1 (2005), pp. S.91-109, here p. 93; 96-98 ff.. On the other hand, the use of a brown triangle is sometimes denied: Herold/Robel, *Roma und Sinti im Konzentrationslager Neuengamme*, p. 106.

⁷² DaA, A 1166 (Zigeuner. Blach Rudolf Bericht: Kummert Gerd).

⁷³ For example for the camp in Wewelsburg, there seems to be no evidence for the use of a brown triangle at all. See John, *Sinti und Roma im KZ Niederhagen/Wewelsburg (Büren-Wewelsburg)*, p. 101 ff.. Some Sinti and Roma also wore the green triangle of the so called „criminals“.

⁷⁴ Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"*, p. 121.

1) Sinti and Roma were usually at the end of the prisoner's hierarchy in the concentration camps⁷⁵. They are frequently mentioned together with Jews and homosexuals and "asocials" in general⁷⁶. In Buchenwald they were said to be the favorite target of the SS, until greater numbers of Jewish prisoners came into the camp⁷⁷. For Dachau there are several accounts from prisoners, who claimed to be abused by the SS⁷⁸. The political prisoner Otto Kohlhofer also remembered the Sinti and Roma of Dachau: "Sie wurden dabei von der SS behandelt wie die Juden, und das heißt am schlechtesten von allen Häftlingen, und viele hielten die Strapazen nicht aus und starben."⁷⁹ This situation somehow changed towards the end of the war, when the German-speaking Sinti and Roma were not only seen as "Zigeuner", but also as "Reichsdeutsche" and for example in Mittelbau-Dora or Bergen-Belsen were appointed as Kapos bei the SS⁸⁰. There are also several examples of male Sinti and Roma being drafted into the "Einheit Dirlewanger" at the end of the war⁸¹.

2) Sinti and Roma had to work in the hardest commandos⁸². In Dachau as well as in Sachsenhausen or Neuengamme, they were deployed in so called "death commandos" like the Klinkerwerk, the Plantation or the "Kommando Elbe"⁸³.

3) The death rate among Sinti and Roma was often higher than the average in the camps.

4) Sinti and Roma were often deported together with other family members.

5) Sinti and Roma often lived in separate barracks, especially until the early 1940s. This means that the SS in the camps was well aware of them as a group (even if they were marked with a black triangle and registered as AZR prisoners)⁸⁴.

6) Sinti and Roma were mostly marked with a black triangle.

⁷⁵ Raimond Reiter, Sinti und Roma im "Dritten Reich" und die Geschichte der Sinti in Braunschweig, Marburg 2002, p. 71.

⁷⁶ Lewy, Gypsies in German Concentration Camps, p. 23; Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 82.

⁷⁷ Schwarz, Sinti und Roma in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern ein allgemeiner Überblick, p. 235 ff.; See also the account of Robert Schneeberger in Romani Rose (Hrsg.), *"Den Rauch hatten wir täglich vor Augen". Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma* (Heidelberg 1999), 118. Langer Bericht bei Steinmetz 1966, 38-39.

⁷⁸ Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid, 122. Rudolf Blach also tells a similar story.

⁷⁹ Holzhaider, Hans: Hungerstreik gegen Diskriminierungen. Süddeutsche Zeitung, 29./30.3.1980, printed in Pogrom 4/1980, 81.

⁸⁰ Thomas Rahe, Sinti und Roma in Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen. Eine Zwischenbilanz der historischen Forschung, in: Neuengamme, KZ-Gedenkstätte (Hrsg.), *Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus. (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14)* Bremen 2012, 108–126, here 115-116.

⁸¹ Thomas Rahe, Sinti und Roma in Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen. Eine Zwischenbilanz der historischen Forschung, in: Neuengamme, KZ-Gedenkstätte (Hrsg.), *Die Verfolgung von Sinti und Roma im Nationalsozialismus. (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland 14)* Bremen 2012, 108–126, here 116.; Several biographies can be found in: Astrid Ley/Günter Morsch, Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen, in: Ley, Astrid/Morsch, Günter (Hrsg.), *Medizin und Verbrechen. Das Krankenrevier des KZ-Sachsenhausen 1936-1945. (Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten, 22)* Berlin 2007, 223–273; Dokument bei Rudolf Blach.

⁸² Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 82.

⁸³ Herold/Robel, Roma und Sinti im Konzentrationslager Neuengamme, p. 106.

⁸⁴ Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 82; Hans Marsalek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen. Dokumentation*, Wien 1995, p. 68.

7) Sinti and Roma were regularly abused for medical experiments, as for example in Dachau during the so called "Seawater-Trials" and for tests on malaria, for experiments on "Fleckfieber" in Buchenwald⁸⁵. In 1943 and 1944 experiments on "Fleckfieber" and with "Phosgengas" were done in Natzweiler-Struthof⁸⁶. The documentation on these experiments and their victims is often better than those on other parts of the history of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps, because investigations and sometimes even trials took place after 1945.

8) Large numbers of Sinti and Roma were sterilized in the concentration camps⁸⁷.

9) The concentration camps were used by the employees of the RHFS to conduct investigations on the prisoners⁸⁸.

10) Since the guards were unable to understand Romanes, it was used as a secret language, as a form of resistance⁸⁹.

Possible Sources for future research

Eyewitness-accounts

- Testimonies
 - o Published and unpublished
 - o Video archives
 - o etc.
- Accounts of other prisoners

Official documentation

- Concentration camps (ITS)
- Collection "Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle"
- Police files
- Local documentation
- etc.

Documents from after '45

- Court files
- Compensation files

Other

- Local remembrance books
- Stolperstein initiatives
- Private documents

Future Research topics

- Providing reliable numbers on Sinti and Roma in German concentration camps
- Sinti and Roma in the early stages of the camp system
- How did the marking inside the camps work? How did the SS identify people as "gypsies"?

⁸⁵ Schwarz, Sinti und Roma in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern ein allgemeiner Überblick, p. 200.

⁸⁶ Awosusi/Pflock, *Sinti und Roma im KZ Natzweiler-Struthof, Anregungen für einen Gedenkstättenbesuch. Geschichte, Rundgang, Biografien, Informationen*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Reiter, *Sinti und Roma im "Dritten Reich" und die Geschichte der Sinti in Braunschweig*, p. 71; Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 82.

⁸⁸ For example in Sachsenhausen: Ley/Morsch, Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen, p. 227.

⁸⁹ Danckwortt, Sinti und Roma als Häftlinge im KZ-Ravensbrück, p. 82; Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage", p. 121.

- The role of the “Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle” for the deportation into the camps
- The work of the “Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle” inside the camps
- Antiziganism of other prisoners
- The status of Sinti and Roma inside the prisoners society
- Solidarity within imprisoned Sinti and Roma, as well as by other prisoners
- Research on singular/exemplary events/transport (like from the Burgenland to Dachau in 1939)
- The Hungarian Roma inside the camp
- Studies that deal with more than one camp
- Gender as a category
- An “integrated history” (Saul Friedländer) of Sinti and Roma in the concentration camps
- The use of compensation files for the research on concentration camps
- Dealing with the imprisonment after ‘45